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ABSTRACT

This paper outlines an approach to administrator assessment and inservice education that contrasts with the frequently haphazard and diverse procedures now prevalent in Canada. The approach is based on the systematic identification of competencies required of an administrator. After reviewing trends in the "competency movement," consideration is given to current practices of interest to trustees and senior administrators in Canadian school systems. A study is cited that assessed the perceptions of supervisors, principals, and teachers concerning the actual and needed competencies of principals. The focus of the paper is on school-based administrators, with particular attention given to the school principal. (Author/JM)

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A COMPETENCY-BASED APPROACH TO
ADMINISTRATOR ASSESSMENT
AND IN-SERVICE

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A COMPETENCY-BASED APPROACH TO
ADMINISTRATOR ASSESSMENT
AND IN-SERVICE

Assessment of administrators is currently of critical interest and concern in school systems across Canada. There appears, however, to be a need for a systematic approach to the practice. A recent survey (Ratsoy, Ingram and Miklos, 1977) of school systems across Canada, for example, found that 14 percent of responding boards had no form of assessment, 59 percent had informal procedures while only 25 percent reported formal assessment practices involving procedures such as written reports on predetermined criteria, management by objectives, job targets or the use of rating scales.

A related issue is the provision of in-service activities which focus on the systematic development of administrative skills. Kelsey and Leullier (1978:6) hinted at the need for such an approach in British Columbia when they reported that "more than one-half of the school districts . . . have no printed policies or established procedures for the identification, selection or training of their administrators."

The purpose of this paper is to outline a promising approach which contrasts to the frequently haphazard and eclectic procedures for assessment and in-service that seem to characterize the Canadian scene. As suggested by the title of the paper, this approach is based on the systematic identification of competencies which are required of an administrator.

After reviewing trends in the so-called "competency movement," consideration will be given to current practices of interest to trustees and senior administrators in Canadian school systems. Reference will be made to a recent study (Caldwell, 1979) conducted in two northern jurisdictions which obtained the perceptions of supervisors, principals and teachers of the actual and preferred competencies of principals. The focus throughout is on the competencies of school-based administrators, with particular attention given to the school principal.

THE COMPETENCY MOVEMENT

It is surely an understatement to observe that the competency movement has produced a lively debate among those concerned with the quality of education. The arguments for and against competency-based programs are well-documented (Harris et al., 1979:127-129) but their extent, origin and nature are worthy of note.

The growth of the movement has been most evident in the field of teacher preparation programs. Houston and Warner (1977:15) provided one indicator in noting that the number of bibliographic items in this field grew from 22 in 1971 to over 6,000 in 1976. Borich (1977:12) suggested that the origin of the movement "may have been more political than substantive" while Houston (1974:5) offered another perspective in considering it to be "culturally based," evolving in the main from the influence of two forces: (1) the press for accountability, which saw a parallel interest in practices such as Management by Objectives (MBO) and Planning, Programming, Budgeting

Systems (PPBS); and (2) the need for more personalization in public institutions.

Competency-based approaches in teacher preparation programs appear to be widespread in the United States, though there is some evidence of increasing interest in Canada.¹ There have been similar but relatively low-profile developments in pre-service and in-service programs for educational administrators.

CONCEPTUALIZING COMPETENCY

Harris et al. (1979:126) observed that "one of the most troublesome aspects of [competency-based education] is the lack of a clear and commonly accepted definition of what a competency is." The term lacks precision despite its frequent use in the literature. Furthermore, words such as "skill," "behavior," "performance," and "competency" often appear to be used interchangeably

Restricting further discussion to the context of educational administration, perhaps the best definition of "competency" has been provided by McCleary (1973:2): "the presence of characteristics or the absence of disabilities which render a person fit, or qualified, to perform a specific task or to assume a defined role." He saw two elements in such a definition: "(1) the specification of the task

¹A survey of teacher preparation programs in 13 Canadian institutions (Division of Field Services, University of Alberta, 1978: 109) found that several are in the process of systematically identifying competencies and restructuring evaluation materials. A skills approach has been used in undergraduate program evaluation in the Faculty of Education at the University of Alberta (Ratsoy, McEwen and Caldwell, 1979).

or defined role and (2) indication of the knowledge, ability, or other identifiable characteristics needed to perform the task or role."

The definition provided by McCleary is a useful starting point for further specification of the term. This specification requires classifications for each element, with the literature in educational administration being a rich source in each instance.

Miklos (1975) provided a useful framework for classifying the first element; that is, the role of an administrator. He cited Gregg in conceptualizing administration as a process, the components of which are planning, organizing, coordinating, evaluating, decision making, communicating and influencing. He also proposed a classification according to tasks or operational area, citing Campbell et al.'s classification of school-community relationships, curriculum and instruction, pupil personnel, staff personnel, physical facilities, and finance and business administration. A matrix of these seven processes and six operational areas produces forty-two "cells" for which competency statements may be formulated. For example, the process of communicating in the operational area of school-community relationships is reflected in the competency statement "the principal communicates to the staff of the school and the system the feelings and desires of the community."

A variety of classifications may be found for the second element of McCleary's formulation, the best known of which is that of Katz (1955): technical skills, human skills, and conceptual skills. Downey (1961) modified the Katz classification when he proposed four skills for an effective principal: (1) technical-managerial skills

[for accounts, records, time tables, correspondence, resource allocation], (2) human-managerial skills ["to stimulate and motivate organization members to maximum realization of the organization's purpose"], (3) technical-educational skills [program development, curriculum problems, teaching techniques] and (4) speculative-creative skills ["encourages creativity, gains new insights through innovation, discussion, and reflection. In short . . . the skills of the educational statesman!"].

More recent work by Mintzberg (1973) has captured the attention of administrators as far as skills are concerned. He deduced eight basic skills from an analysis of the work of managers: peer skills, leadership skills, conflict-resolution skills, information skills, skills in unstructured decision making, resource allocation skills, entrepreneurial skills and skills of introspection. March (1974) provided additional insights with five analytical skills: analysis of expertise [the management of knowledge], analysis of coalitions [the management of conflict], the analysis of ambiguity [the management of goals], the analysis of time [the management of attention] and the analysis of information [the management of inference].

The classifications summarised above are evident in the various projects which have sought to systematically identify the competencies of school administrators. Several endeavors in the United States and Canada are summarized below.

Identifying the Competencies

A number of projects and studies have involved the systematic identification of competencies required of school administrators.

Project ROME (Results Oriented Management in Education), commenced in Georgia in 1974 with the identification of competency statements from several sources: reviews of professional literature in educational administration, objectives-based workshops with principals, and on-the-job observations of principals' performance. Approximately 4,000 statements of duties, roles and responsibilities were subsequently reduced to 80 items. These statements reflected the dimensions proposed by Miklos discussed earlier in this paper; namely, process and operational area. By 1977, 273 competency indicators had been developed and field-tested in a variety of school settings.¹

The SEST Project (Special Education Supervisor Training Project) was conducted at the University of Texas at Austin, commencing in 1972. The objectives were to design, develop and test a competency-based program of graduate preparation for Special Education Services. Twenty-four critical competencies were identified in the operational areas of developing curriculum, developing learning resources, staffing for instruction, organizing for instruction, utilizing supporting services, providing in-service education and relating to the public. Of particular interest as far as professional development is concerned is the fact that pre-service and in-service learning resources have been developed for each of these 24 critical competencies. These include films, games, instruments, kits, manuals, programmed materials, simulations, study packets and audiotapes. A wide range

¹Details of Project ROME may be obtained from Dr. Chad D. Ellett, Project ROME, 228 Fain Hall, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia, 30602.

of competency assessment materials have also been produced.¹

The UCEA-Atlanta Project (Culbertson et al., 1974) dealt with the role, pre-service and in-service training, performance objectives and evaluation for school principals. Thirty-two competencies in eight operational areas were identified and validated by a panel of prominent educators. These have been used, often with modifications, to meet a variety of local needs. This writer (Caldwell, 1979) used the UCEA-Atlanta list in identifying the professional development needs of principals in the Northwest Territories. Zechman (1977) reported their use in Pennsylvania.

Several studies focusing exclusively on professional development needs have also utilized the classifications of competencies discussed above. In Canada, for example, Robertson (1975) used the Miklos classification of process and task in his study of the professional development needs of principals in Alberta. Thirty-seven need statements were classified in this fashion. A recent study in British Columbia (Storey, 1978) used the same framework in identifying the work-related learning interests and activities for principals in ten school districts. Thirty-seven statements of "learning interest" were utilized. In another Alberta study, Pawliuk and Pickard (1976) added the Mintzberg list of basic managerial skills to the Miklos framework to produce a three-dimensional classification of 65 need statements.

¹Details of the SEST Project may be obtained from Dr. Ben Harris, Director, Special Education Supervisor Training Project, Department of Educational Administration, University of Texas at Austin.

STRATEGIES FOR USE

Turning now to the uses of competency specifications, Harris et al. (1979) have provided accounts of their application for personnel selection, training and retraining, assignment and reassignment, and performance evaluation. Two uses are discussed briefly below.

Professional Development

Harris et al. (1979:124) asserted:

Although we do not take the position that all training activities must be shaped in the competency mold, well-designed lists of needed competencies could very well provide the framework for planning many such activities.

Priorities for professional development have indeed been identified through competency-based needs assessments. In the Alberta study of Robertson (1975), all principals in the province were asked to make 3 responses for each of the 37 need statements: (1) an estimate of their present level of skill, (2) an estimate of the optimum level of skill required for successful performance, and (3) an indication of the priority placed on the development of the skill. In general terms, it was found that processes related to the operational areas of staff personnel, school program and pupil personnel had the highest priorities for skill development. The single process most in need of development was evaluation.

The Alberta study of Pawliuk and Pickard (1976) recognized the multi-dimensional nature of the concept of need. These writers cited the view of Konrad, Long and Small (1975:6) that the three dimensions of need were (1) importance—is the need critically related to the job performance of school administrators? (2) readiness—

is the need of mutual concern to practising school administrators?
 (3) urgency—does the need require immediate attention or can it wait to be addressed? All Alberta principals were asked to make 3 responses along those lines for each of the 65 need statements. Respondents identified evaluation of staff personnel and school programs as being the most important needs as well as planning as it related to school programs. Additional information collected in this study concerned the mode of delivery preferred by administrators.

The British Columbia study by Storey (1978) invited principals in ten districts to indicate their learning interests among a list of 37 items. Priorities were reported as well as preferred learning activities [modes of delivery]. The three items of top priority interest were (1) evaluating the effectiveness of the school's instructional program, (2) developing an effective approach to the supervision of instruction, and (3) providing for pupils with special needs. The least frequently reported item as far as priority interest was concerned was that concerned with advising students about course and program selection.

The surveys of in-service needs were large-scale endeavors involving many school systems. The major benefits of the approach would appear to lie in its application within a single system (or even within a particular school). This writer is currently engaged in such a project for the Department of Education in the Northwest Territories involving a parallel study in Northland School Division, Alberta. Four questions were posed (Caldwell, 1979) as a guide for the collection of information:

1. What are the perceptions of supervisory personnel, principals, assistant principals and teachers with respect to the competencies currently demonstrated by principals in the Northwest Territories?

2. What are the opinions of supervisory personnel, principals, assistant principals and teachers with respect to the competencies which should be demonstrated by principals in the Northwest Territories?
3. What differences exist among supervisory personnel, principals and teachers with respect to the perceptions and opinions set out in questions 1 and 2 above?
4. What differences exist between instructional personnel in the Northwest Territories and those in another northern jurisdiction with respect to the perceptions and opinions set out in questions 1 and 2 above?

Thirty-two competencies based on those identified in the UCEA—Atlanta Project were prepared and validated for use in the study. Priorities for professional development were derived from two sources: (1) "discrepancy scores" obtained by subtracting ratings of competence from ratings of importance, and (2) responses to an open-ended question which asked respondents to identify the three competencies which they considered to be "most in need of development."

The findings of the study will be available shortly.¹

Information gathered earlier suggests, however, that priorities among competencies for administrators in northern jurisdictions may differ from those elsewhere. A diagnostic workshop in March, 1978, involving senior high principals and their supervisors revealed (Caldwell, 1978) the critical importance of competencies in the area of developing school-community relations; the four competencies in this area appeared in the top ten of the thirty-two rankings. Such uniformly high rankings have not been found in studies elsewhere.

¹Further information may be obtained from Mr. Lorne Smith, Coordinator of In-Service Training, Department of Education, Yellowknife, NWT.

Assessment

Harris et al. (1979:125) concluded that:

. . . if needed competencies serve as the basis for selecting, training, and assigning personnel, it is logical that the same competencies should be the basis for evaluating performance.

The development of assessment procedures has been an important feature of projects such as ROME and SEST, with instruments for ratings by self, supervisors, peers and others.

The development of assessment procedures requires a further specification of competencies to meet local needs. For example, the statement "The principal enlists the aid of the community in assessing needs and setting broad instructional goals" requires a listing of activities which will effectively involve the community. Such a listing may include reference to particular individuals and groups, the frequency and manner of involvement, and the type of documents which may be required. Agreement on these specifications between the principal and supervisor would appear to be an important first step in the process. Their identification may be a suitable focus for a professional development activity. Similarly, for gaps between expectations and performance.

Two approaches have proved useful in a number of school systems. PEEL (Performance Evaluation of the Educational Leader)¹ involves the five phases of a continuous process:

Awareness	Developing awareness of the need and desire for improved competence and evaluation. Mini-workshops are recommended.
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¹ An overview of the program is given by Metzger (1976). Details may be obtained from the Department of Educational Administration, Arizona State University, Tempe, Arizona.

Training	Intensive three-four day workshop on evaluation procedures.
Implementation	Establishing objectives based on local school or district priorities and on assessed individual needs.
Evaluation	Periodic assessment of competencies by self and others.
Follow-up	Identification of strengths and weaknesses establishes priorities for professional development and continuation of the process.

The Quadrant Assessment Model (QAM) also defines a systematic, competency-based approach to evaluation. QAM is a process in which "ideal" profiles of the principal are compared to "actual" profiles of a principal or group of principals. Items which make up the profile may be generated using a local task-force approach. The approach (see McCleary and Miller, 1977) can be adapted to a school district or region. Its relationship to professional development programs is readily apparent.

MATCHING COMPETENCIES AND LEARNING RESOURCES

Implementation of the approaches discussed in this paper requires a matching of competencies and learning resources if "gaps" between actual and preferred performance are to be closed.

Project SEST provides the systematic matching described above. For example, the competency "supervising with the clinical model" is broken down into sub-competencies, each of which is matched with appropriate training materials. "Use of observation systems" (a sub-competency) requires skill development in the use of the Flanders' Interaction Analysis System, OScAR V and the Harris-McIntyre Pupil Response Inventory.

Administrator Competency Development Project

The matching of competencies and resources for use in pre-service and in-service settings is a feature of the Administrator Competency Development Project underway in the Department of Educational Administration at the University of Alberta. This three-year project, funded in large part by the Department of Advanced Education and Manpower, also involves an identification of competencies and the development of strategies for their assessment.¹ The focus is on competencies of school-based administrators, especially the principal.

CONCLUSION

There is evidence of increasing interest in Canada in a competency-based approach to the professional development and assessment of administrators. Trustees and administrators with interests in this area may wish to examine these developments more closely in their search for an improved instructional program. It will be readily apparent, however, that the adoption of such an approach will require careful attention to the strategies of planned change. But the effort may be worth it in view of Harris et al.'s (1979:143) contention that:

Personnel administration will be shifting its emphasis from recruitment and selection to assigning, reassigning, balancing, and evaluating personnel in the years ahead. Competency specifications will inevitably become important tools for performing these tasks.

¹ Further information on the Administrator Competency Development Project may be obtained from the Department of Educational Administration, University of Alberta, Edmonton. Project Director is J. E. Seger; Project Associates are Brian Caldwell and Dan Magnan.

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